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COMMITTEE ON THE EXERCISE OF THE INALIENABLE
RIGHTS OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 230th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Monday, 9 June 1997, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. KA (Senegal)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.30 a.m.

SPECIAL MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE IN COMMEMORATION OF THE THIRTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE OCCUPATION BY ISRAEL OF THE PALESTINIAN TERRITORY, INCLUDING JERUSALEM, AND OTHER ARAB TERRITORIES

Statement by the Chairman

1. The CHAIRMAN welcomed all those attending the Special Meeting to commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of the occupation by Israel of the West Bank, including Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip and other Arab territories. Their participation was a clear demonstration of the international community's continuing concern about the fate of the Palestinian people, its rights and its homeland, which had been occupied since 1967.

2. From the very first days of Israel's occupation of the Palestinian and other Arab territories by force in 1967 and its annexation of Jerusalem, the Security Council, the General Assembly and the entire international community had repeatedly expressed concern about a political solution and the need to find ways to bring about a peaceful, just and comprehensive settlement of the Middle East conflict and, in particular, the question of Palestine. The Committee, in its first report to the General Assembly in 1976, had described the plight of the Palestinian people, hundreds of thousands of whom had been forced to live in destitution, many being cast in the role of refugee not once, but twice or even three times in their lifetime. Regrettably, 21 years later, the situation on the ground, far from improving, had in many respects grown worse. Israel was still occupying large areas of Palestinian land. Perhaps the most worrisome fact was that, while withdrawing from some Palestinian areas as called for by the bilateral agreements, Israel was leaving behind Jewish enclaves whose size and population were expanding steadily. Thousands of Palestinians scattered throughout the world were unable to return to their homes and claim their property. Moreover, the Palestinian economy was in a state of devastation and many Palestinian households were living below the poverty line because it was not yet possible to create Palestinian national economic institutions. Jerusalem had been occupied and annexed by force and was surrounded by Jewish settlements despite its status as an international city.

3. The first ray of hope for the Palestinian people had been the Peace Conference on the Middle East, held at Madrid in 1991. The Committee had believed that, since the Conference was based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and the principle of land for peace, it could not fail to usher in a new era in the quest for peace in the Middle East. Guided by the two sponsors of the peace process, the Russian Federation and the United States of America, with Norway playing a crucial catalytic role, Israelis and Palestinians had courageously faced each other at the negotiating table. A wall of misunderstanding had fallen, and a number of major bilateral agreements had been initialled and signed since 1993.

4. The peace process, although laborious, intense and difficult, had given the international community reason to hope that a just and comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict would be reached. Now, however, the Palestinian

people was surrounded by Jewish settlements in the West Bank, including Jerusalem, and in the Gaza Strip. Israel's announced plans for new settlements and the expansion of existing settlements threatened the survival of the Palestinian people; they represented a danger to peace and a source of insecurity for the Palestinians in the present and the future.

5. Ever since 1967, the United Nations had emphasized that Israel's construction and expansion of settlements in the occupied Palestinian and other Arab territories was a deliberate violation of its obligations under the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. Israel's actions also manifestly contradicted the agreements already signed as part of the peace process, since they pre-determined the outcome of the permanent status negotiations.

6. The question of Jerusalem had been brought to the forefront recently by the Israeli authorities' illegal settlement activities. As the Israelis and the Palestinians gradually approached the final, most sensitive phase of their negotiations, the peace process had suffered a serious setback. Fully aware that the fate and the future of the Holy City would be at the centre of the permanent status negotiations, the Israelis had decided to proceed with plans to surround the city with a dense ring of settlements and a road infrastructure which bypassed several Palestinian villages. In countless resolutions, the Security Council and the General Assembly had declared that any attempt by Israel to alter the demographic composition and status of the occupied territories, including Jerusalem, was null and void. The resolution adopted by the General Assembly at its recent emergency special session had unequivocally reaffirmed that position.

7. Thirty years of occupation had also had a devastating impact on economic activity in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. For years, the United Nations had been a major contributor to economic assistance and recovery programmes for the Palestinian people. In the context of the peace process, the international donor community had stepped up the provision of substantial economic and technical assistance to the Palestinian people in practically every field where it was needed. Notwithstanding that effort, the Palestinian economy remained fragmented, vulnerable, unstable and dependent on the Israeli economy. Much remained to be done to open up the Palestinian territories, which were currently cut off from the rest of the world.

8. Years of military occupation and denial of fundamental human rights had virtually destroyed the fabric of Palestinian society. Even with the peace process in place, Israel continued to violate the individual and collective rights of the Palestinian people almost daily. The Israeli authorities' arbitrary arrests and detentions of Palestinians, punitive expeditions against innocent populations, and closures of the Palestinian territory had been condemned by the international community. Beatings and torture of Palestinian detainees had been reported by human rights organizations. Despite widespread international criticism, Israel was still practising forms of collective punishment, although the Palestinian people had hoped that the human rights situation would improve after the signing of the peace agreements.

9. The international community must recommit itself to the goal of ending Israel's occupation of Palestinian lands and finding a just solution to the question of Palestine. The Committee, in keeping with the mandate entrusted to it by the General Assembly, would continue to stand firmly by the Palestinian people and would spare no effort to help put an end to the illegal occupation and achieve a peaceful, comprehensive and just settlement of the question of Palestine in accordance with international law and with the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people to self-determination, independence and the establishment of a State in its homeland.

10. The international community must also reaffirm its support for the peace process and for the agreements already reached and resolve to ensure that everything was done to protect and preserve that process, in the interest of all the peoples of the region and for the sake of international peace and security.

Statement by the Secretary-General

11. The SECRETARY-GENERAL said that, on the thirtieth anniversary of the Arab-Israeli war of June 1967, the Special Meeting reflected the international community's continued dedication to finding a permanent and peaceful solution to the question of Palestine.

12. The United Nations had always played a central role in assisting the parties in their efforts to reach a negotiated settlement. The signing of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements by Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization in September 1993 had been a major breakthrough in those efforts. The beginning of the Oslo peace process had also opened up major new opportunities for supportive action by the United Nations. Following the establishment of an elected Palestinian administration in Gaza and in parts of the West Bank, the United Nations had increased its activities in the region in order to advance the economic and social development of the Palestinian territories.

13. A special mechanism for the effective coordination of international assistance had been created, in cooperation with the Palestinian Authority. A United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories had been appointed, based in Gaza, to serve as focal point for all United Nations agencies and programmes operating on the ground. Furthermore, in order to render the United Nations more effective, it had been decided to move the headquarters of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) from Vienna to Gaza in 1996.

14. Earlier in the year, he had been very much encouraged by the conclusion of the agreement reached on 15 January 1997 between Israel and the Palestinian Authority regarding Hebron and other important issues. He had expressed the hope that the agreement would pave the way for further progress towards the full implementation of the process envisaged in the Declaration of Principles adopted in Oslo. Regrettably, there had been a number of setbacks in the peace process since then. There had been acts of violence, which he had condemned in the strongest terms. He had appealed to the parties not to allow the actions of a radical few to derail a peace process designed for the good of the many. He had also expressed deep concern that, despite appeals from the international

community, the Government of Israel had decided to proceed with construction work at Jabal Abu Ghneim/Har Homa. He had called on the parties to do their utmost to find mutually acceptable solutions and to proceed with the peace process.

15. The great concern of the international community for the future of peace in the area had been manifested in two meetings of the Security Council and the General Assembly, including an emergency special session held in late April. He sincerely hoped that the parties would intensify their efforts to overcome existing obstacles to a speedy return to the peace process. He would continue to do his utmost to mobilize the resources of the United Nations system to meet the humanitarian and development needs of the Palestinians, in support of the objective of achieving a just and lasting peace.

16. Mr. LAVROV (Russian Federation), President of the Security Council, said that, since the outbreak of the 1967 hostilities, the Security Council had been closely involved in efforts to defuse the conflict in the Middle East and to find a just and comprehensive solution acceptable to the parties concerned. Its resolution 242 (1967), adopted unanimously at the Council's 1382nd meeting, continued to reflect the United Nations position regarding the question of Palestine and the situation in the Middle East. The principles set forth in that resolution, as well as in other resolutions adopted over the years, served as a foundation for international action aimed at achieving peace and stability in the region.

17. On numerous occasions, the Security Council had directed its attention to various political and humanitarian aspects of the question of Palestine. In so doing, the Council had always been aware of the special importance of the Palestinian dimension in the quest for an overall peace settlement in the Middle East.

18. Since the Peace Conference on the Middle East, held at Madrid in 1991, the Palestinian people had entered a new stage in its history. The Middle East peace process launched at that landmark meeting had dramatically changed the climate in the region, making possible for the first time face-to-face negotiations between the Palestinians and the Israelis.

19. In the years that followed, the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements and the Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip had been signed, and a series of other important agreements had been initialled by Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization. The Palestinians, under the leadership of the Palestinian Authority, were now in control of their daily lives in some parts of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Assisted by the United Nations and the international donor community, the Palestinian Authority had embarked on the gigantic task of creating a new and viable Palestinian national economy and setting up new Palestinian national institutions. The Council was much gratified by the wide-ranging economic and technical assistance rendered to the Palestinian people by international donors, including the United Nations. It stressed the need for thorough and effective coordination of that assistance effort by the United Nations, through the mechanisms currently in place.

20. As the Palestinian people went through a crucial transition period, fraught with setbacks, it was of paramount importance that the international community should continue to work hard to make the peace process a genuine success. The members of the Council were fully aware of the obstacles and hidden dangers in the way of the peace negotiations. They were following the course of the negotiations closely, bearing in mind the many concerns and mutual claims of the parties. The Council appreciated the overwhelming international support for the agreements already reached and hoped that it would help the parties to achieve the goals set at the start of the Madrid peace process. The Council was also duty-bound to assist the parties in accomplishing their historic mission of reconciliation and peace. The Council members called upon the Israelis and the Palestinians to fulfil their obligations under the agreements reached, move forward with courage and resolve along the path to a Middle East peace, and exercise maximum restraint in their actions on the ground so as not to break the fragile building blocks of the peace process.

21. For its part, the Security Council, guided by its responsibilities under the Charter, would continue its efforts to encourage the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting solution of the question of Palestine and the establishment of peace in the Middle East, in the interest and for the benefit of all parties concerned, including the Palestinian people.

22. Mr. MABILANGAN (Philippines), Vice-President of the General Assembly, reading out a statement on behalf of the President of the General Assembly, noted that in the past few months, the Security Council had twice held extensive discussions on the question of Palestine. The fifty-first session of the General Assembly had been resumed and an emergency special session had been held. The discussions in the Security Council had proved inconclusive, since the Council had been unable to take action because of lack of unanimity among its permanent members.

23. The convening of the emergency special session of the General Assembly in accordance with General Assembly resolution 377 (V) of 3 November 1950 entitled "Uniting for peace", at the request of a Member State and with the concurrence of a large majority of members, and the resolution adopted by the emergency session had demonstrated clearly the grave concern of the Member States and their awareness of the implications of the current situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, in particular in Jerusalem.

24. The question of Palestine remained the most intractable conflict situation in United Nations history. More than five years previously, historic decisions had been taken by courageous and far-sighted leaders of Palestine and Israel. Encouraged and supported by Powers from outside the region, those leaders had overcome their fear of committing themselves to a common destiny and had taken decisions to agree on mutually reinforcing steps that would lead to a peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine.

25. It was regrettable that the prospect of a just and durable peace for the peoples of Palestine and the Middle East was now seriously at risk and had recently been jeopardized by the actions of the Israeli Government.

26. The United Nations should be a vocal critic of those who wanted to derail the peace process. There were milestone United Nations resolutions that recognized the right of the Palestinian people to manifest its aspiration for the achievement of its inalienable rights, and yet the Palestinians were the people whose struggle for a homeland continued to be denied. The international community must continue to support that legitimate cause on the basis of international law, the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and United Nations resolutions.

27. The current construction work at Jabal Abu Ghneim was merely an extension of an established Israeli policy of systematically altering the character, demographic composition and legal status of Jerusalem. The international community could not allow the continued violation of international law, the principles of the Charter and relevant United Nations resolutions, in particular Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), and other United Nations resolutions, including resolution ES-10/2 adopted recently by the General Assembly at its emergency special session. Those resolutions underscored the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force and of changing the legal status of Jerusalem by altering the character and demographic composition of the Holy City.

28. The steps taken by the Israeli Government in defiance of world public opinion eroded the confidence and trust so necessary for peace to prevail in the region. Without a doubt, the question of Jerusalem remained the crux of efforts for a lasting peace. Given its critical importance, attempts to change its status could not be condoned by the international community. Israel must comply with the relevant United Nations resolutions on the issue. The status of Jerusalem, the Holy City of the world's three major religions, could be resolved only in the permanent status negotiations, as agreed by the parties concerned.

29. Peace must be given a chance to take root and flourish in the region, but peace could be meaningful and durable only if the Palestinians were a part of it. The international community must stand ready to help not only with words of encouragement, but also with substantive action to ensure that peace, justice and stability prevailed.

30. The Committee had done much to contribute to the Palestinian cause by bolstering efforts to promote United Nations decisions on the question of Palestine. He expressed appreciation to the Committee for its untiring endeavours to fulfil its mandate under General Assembly resolutions.

31. Mr. AL-KIDWA (Observer for Palestine) read out a message from Mr. Yasser Arafat, President of the Palestinian Authority, expressing appreciation for the Committee's work and for the convening of the Special Meeting, which reaffirmed that ending the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory and reversing its consequences were the most important conditions for the establishment of peace. That occupation represented one of the ugliest forms of occupation in contemporary history, involving expansionist policies and practices, especially in East Jerusalem; illegal Israeli colonial settlements; usurpation and exploitation of Palestinian natural resources; and the building of infrastructure separate from that available to the Palestinian people, all of which represented a unique mixture of colonialism and apartheid-like

arrangements. The occupying Power had carried out oppressive policies involving the killing, jailing, torture, administrative detention and deportation of Palestinians and the demolition of their homes. It had also imposed complete economic control over the Palestinian territory, exploiting it as a market and Palestinian workers as a source of cheap labour.

32. Those Israeli policies and practices represented a comprehensive, calculated plan to colonize the land, exploit the population and obstruct the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. Israel had persisted in those policies and practices for 30 years, in the face of unanimous international opposition as reflected in hundreds of resolutions of the Security Council, the General Assembly and other United Nations organs. More than ever before, it was necessary to reverse that situation through the realization of the Palestinian people's inalienable rights, including the right of return, the right to self-determination and the right to establish an independent State with Jerusalem as its capital.

33. The United Nations had a fundamental role to play in the achievement of a comprehensive settlement in the Middle East, which must be based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and on the principle of land for peace, as stipulated in the agreements concluded between the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Government of Israel. All Member States should adhere to the commendable positions of principle taken by the United Nations concerning the question of Palestine, which reflected the principles of international law and justice, and should show seriousness of purpose in following up the outcome of the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, including the implementation of the mechanism defined in General Assembly resolution ES-10/2, until Israel complied with the will of the international community.

34. The tenth emergency special session had been convened in response to the crisis in the Middle East peace process caused by the intransigent positions and policies of the current Israeli Government, which violated the letter and the spirit of its agreements with the Palestine Liberation Organization, the fourth Geneva Convention and the relevant Security Council resolutions. The Israeli Government had continued its attempts to create new facts on the ground, pre-empting the final status negotiations and predetermining their outcome, particularly in occupied East Jerusalem. It had continued to confiscate land and build new settlements and had refused to implement many of the basic provisions of the agreements; instead, it was pursuing the economic suffocation of the Palestinian people and preventing the free movement of persons and goods.

35. Nevertheless, the Palestinian people remained committed to the peace process and to the implementation in good faith of the agreements reached. The sponsors of the peace process and the other parties concerned must intensify their efforts in order to salvage the peace process and achieve progress towards the establishment of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East. In the thirtieth year of Israeli occupation, the Palestinians looked to the Committee to help them end that situation and alleviate the injustices which they had borne for half a century, and to support their efforts to realize their inalienable rights in their homeland, which was the cradle of civilization, love and peace.

36. The CHAIRMAN said that the Committee was determined to continue and intensify its efforts, within the framework of its mandate, to help promote a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine that would enable the Palestinian people to exercise its inalienable national rights as soon as possible.

The meeting was suspended at 11.10 and resumed at 11.25.

37. The CHAIRMAN drew attention to a message from the Chairman of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, the text of which had been circulated to the members of the Committee.

38. Mr. LONDOÑO-PAREDES (Colombia) read out a message from the President of the Republic of Colombia, Mr. Ernesto Samper Pizano, in his capacity as Chairman of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, in which the Movement reiterated its unflinching solidarity with the Palestinian people and its legitimate aspirations. The international community had been observing closely the tremendous efforts of the parties to implement the Madrid and Oslo agreements. Unfortunately, Israel's decision to move ahead with the settlements in Jabal Abu Ghneim, in flagrant violation of those agreements, had undermined the atmosphere of cordiality and frankness that had prevailed. The Movement had not accepted the explanations given for the construction of the settlements. The entire international community had known that the Israeli decision would disrupt the peace process and cause friction and conflict at a time of great importance and delicate balance in the overall situation in the Middle East.

39. Despite the progress made in recent years, the Palestinian cause was again facing serious risks. The Movement regretted that the atmosphere of harmony and trust that had prevailed until recently had deteriorated, and reiterated its unflinching support for the Palestinian people's legitimate struggle to ensure respect for its inalienable right to self-determination and independence. The United Nations must also remain vigilant until the Palestinian people established an independent, sovereign State in its own territory and the refugee problem was solved in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions. The Movement urged full implementation of the relevant Security Council resolutions and emphasized the need for the mechanism established by the General Assembly to deal with the Palestinian question to continue functioning effectively.

40. The international community could not close its eyes to the occupation of Arab lands by force or to the desperate plight of hundreds of thousands of Palestinian men, women and children who had daily suffered the consequences of war, death, hunger and sickness. Nor could it turn its back on a critical situation that threatened international peace.

41. Peoples had the right to live in peace and to control their own territory within clearly defined borders, without limitations or restrictions of any kind and in conditions conducive to economic and social development. All nations had a moral obligation to contribute to those purposes.

42. Mr. EFFENDI (Indonesia), speaking on behalf of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia in his capacity as Chairman of the Twenty-Fourth Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers, reaffirmed the unswerving commitment of the Government and people of Indonesia, and of the members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference to the goal of achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine, which was a key to securing peace and security in the Middle East.

43. Three decades of Israeli occupation had exacted a heavy toll on the lives of the Palestinian people. There had been thinly veiled attempts at altering the demographic composition and physical characteristics of the occupied Palestinian territory, incessant human rights violations, plundering of the territory's natural resources and exploitation of its labour force. Scores of United Nations resolutions had categorically rejected those illegal Israeli policies and practices. A just solution to the Middle East conflict must be based on Israel's complete and unconditional withdrawal from all the occupied Arab territories and on recognition of the political rights of the Palestinian people. That position was also reflected in the numerous communiqués adopted by the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

44. The Special Meeting was being held at a critical juncture in international efforts to achieve a just, comprehensive and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine. The gains of the recent past were in peril. Israel had perpetrated a series of acts which violated the letter and the spirit of the Declaration of Principles and subsequent agreements, as well as United Nations resolutions, the fourth Geneva Convention and fundamental tenets of international law. Countless commitments had been broken with respect to the implementation of the agreements already reached. The expansion of settlements had been intensified, steps which Israel was to have carried out during the interim period remained unimplemented, and Israel had arrogantly set aside agreed time-tables. Recent events were further evidence of the recklessness with which Israel treated the peace process. All those actions had been overwhelmingly rejected by the international community.

45. Notwithstanding such provocation, the future of peace in the Middle East must be secured. Israel must comply fully and consistently with the provisions of the agreements reached with the Palestinians and proceed with final status negotiations on the basis of the recognition of the inalienable right of the Palestinians to an independent State with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital. It was also imperative to reinforce the peace process through concerted international efforts to strengthen the foundations of the Palestinian nation and improve Palestinian living conditions.

46. Comprehensive peace in the Middle East would remain elusive as long as Israel remained adamant in occupying the Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, and other Arab territories. Unfortunately, the same manifest lack of commitment to the peace process on Israel's part had been evident in Israeli-Syrian and Israeli-Lebanese negotiations.

47. The past 30 years had seen unprecedented transformations in the global situation. The ending of the cold war, the resolution of numerous conflicts and increasing globalization had all enhanced prospects for a new era based on

stable peace, security and development. Peace had continued to elude the Middle East region, however, where a generation of young people had known only occupation, subjugation and oppression at the hands of the occupying Power. The passage of time would not diminish the permanent and historic responsibility of the United Nations to remain seized of the question until the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people were realized.

48. Mr. MAPURANGA (Zimbabwe), speaking on behalf of the current Chairman of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), noted that the situation in the occupied territories was continuing to deteriorate, causing hardship and despair among Palestinians. Israel had continued and even intensified its policies of land confiscation and settlement, seriously undermining the achievements of the peace process and causing growing concern for the future of peace in the region.

49. The Security Council and the General Assembly had been overwhelmingly supportive of the series of bold steps taken by the leaders of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization since the Madrid Conference of 1991, in particular, the signing of the Declaration of Principles. The gradual improvement in relations among the parties concerned had begun to shape what had largely come to be accepted as an irreversible peace process. Zimbabwe was a strong advocate of that process, which was the only viable option for peace and stability in the region. OAU had consistently opposed any attempt to disrupt the peace process. It did not recognize Israel's annexation of Jerusalem and regarded as illegal Israel's bid to change the legal status, demographic composition and character of occupied East Jerusalem through a policy aimed at the artificial creation of a Jewish majority in the city. That was a flagrant violation of General Assembly and Security Council resolutions emphasizing the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force. All actions by Israel to change the legal status of Jerusalem were null and void.

50. In its preoccupation with being seen to be even-handed, the international community at times appeared to forget that the continued occupation of Palestinian land posed a mortal threat to the entire peace process. The policy of creating new settlements on that land should be vigorously opposed.

51. The international community must, at that current critical juncture, save the Middle East region from the threat of conflict and war. The provisions of the agreements already reached between the Palestine Liberation Organization and Israel must be complied with in good faith and the Israeli Government must accept the facts on the ground and resolve all pending issues with the Palestinian Authority, including the immediate reversal of its policy of building new settlements.

52. The hopes of the long-suffering peoples of the Middle East had been raised by the vision of a future of peace. Their leaders had made significant strides in that direction. Solutions would not be durable, however, if intransigence prevailed over the capacity to look for compromise. The most promising opportunity for peace in a generation must be seized in earnest immediately. OAU urged the parties to resume contacts, in good faith, on the basis of the agreements reached and to seek inspiration in their own achievements since Madrid in their search for lasting peace.

53. Mr. AL-SALAFI (Observer for the League of Arab States), reading out a message from the Secretary-General of the League, recalled that, as a result of its 1967 aggression against three Arab countries, Israel had occupied the entire Palestinian territory of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, as well as other Arab territory in Sinai and the Golan. That occupation continued, in flagrant violation of international law, the 1949 Geneva Conventions, Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978) and the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly, and in total disregard of the will of the international community and of the efforts made to find a peaceful, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine and the Arab-Israeli conflict.

54. Israel had annexed East Jerusalem despite the international consensus opposing that step and regarding it as null and void, and had begun the Judaization of the City and its Holy Places. The archaeological excavations around the Haram al-Sharif, that it had begun at that time, had continued up to the present moment. Israel was now imposing a policy of closure on Palestinian towns in the West Bank and keeping them in a state of siege. It was continuing to expropriate land and to establish settlements, in disregard of all internationally recognized principles, laws and resolutions. Between June 1967 and the beginning of 1997, some 3 million of the total of 5.8 million dunams of land in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip had been expropriated. The latest unlawful act had been the decision of the Israeli Government to establish a Jewish settlement on Jabal Abu Ghneim in East Jerusalem, which had caused a wave of anger to sweep the Arab, Islamic and Christian worlds. That act had been condemned by the General Assembly, had halted the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations and had brought the entire peace process to the verge of collapse.

55. Israel's current practices included the imposition of its own curricula on schools in East Jerusalem and the withdrawal of Israeli identity documents from Palestinian residents in a manner that left no room for doubt that its intention was to eliminate the Palestinian presence there.

56. There were now more than 200 Israeli settlements in all parts of the Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, so that the areas under Palestinian administration had been transformed into an archipelago of isolated islands for the purpose of preventing development and dismembering the Palestinian homeland. Israel had also seized control of Palestinian water and severely restricted its use by Palestinians for agricultural or other purposes. Other administrative measures were impeding the economic development of the occupied territories so as to ensure that the Palestinian economy would remain subservient to the Israeli economy.

57. Israel's constant violations of human rights had adversely affected all aspects of life. Israel was the only country in the world where the judicial authorities had enacted laws for the torture of detainees, the Israeli High Court of Justice, on 11 January and 14 and 17 November 1996, having permitted the use of torture and physical pressure against Palestinian citizens. As punishments, some 2,400 houses had been completely demolished and 3,500 partially demolished as of May 1997, trees had been uprooted, and civil and political freedoms had been restricted or denied. All such practices were in flagrant violation of the 1949 Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of

Civilian Persons in Time of War, which the Security Council had declared to be legally applicable to all the territories occupied by Israel since 1967.

58. Given its strong desire for a just and lasting peace in the Middle East, the Council of the League of Arab States had expressed support for the peace process in its resolution 5092 of 12 September 1991, even before the Madrid Peace Conference. It had welcomed all the agreements concluded in the framework of the peace process, and it had considered the Palestinian-Israeli agreement of 1993 an important first step towards the fulfilment of the principle of land for peace. The Arab Summit Conference held in Cairo in June 1996 had confirmed the commitment of the Arab States to continuing the peace process, as a goal to be reached under the auspices of the United Nations and as one that required a corresponding commitment by Israel to restore rights and territory and to respect the security of all the States of the region.

59. The current policies of the Government of Israel, however, ran counter to the peace process and were based on violating all the agreements signed by its predecessor. Those policies had exacerbated the suffering of the Palestinian people and their economic and social situation.

60. At its meeting held on 31 March 1997, the Council of the League had recommended that all steps taken towards the normalization of relations with Israel should be halted and that the relevant offices and missions should be closed until Israel complied with the Madrid Conference decisions and the principle of land for peace and implemented the agreements reached during the peace talks with the parties concerned on all tracks. It had further recommended that Arab participation in the multilateral negotiations should be suspended and that the Arab boycott should be maintained until such time as a just and comprehensive peace was achieved.

61. The League of Arab States believed that the Middle East must be a region of peace, security and stability. It was certain that the United Nations would do all in its power to meet its responsibilities for the maintenance of international peace and security, and that it would take whatever steps were necessary to compel Israel to comply with the United Nations resolutions relating to the Arab-Israeli conflict and the question of Palestine. It would do so out of commitment to the maintenance of the peace process and to the use of a single standard in its dealings with Member States and in order to safeguard its credibility.

62. There could be no doubt that the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People would make a valuable contribution to creating the conditions in which the Palestinian people would achieve its legitimate hopes and aspirations, notably its right to exercise self-determination and establish an independent State on its national soil with Jerusalem as its capital.

63. Mr. EKIN (International Coordinating Committee for NGOs on the Question of Palestine) said that the partnership between non-governmental organizations and the United Nations on the question of Palestine was often taken for granted. However, that partnership had begun amid widespread scepticism as to whether it

could work, considering that it dealt with one of the most controversial issues on the world's political agenda.

64. Over the years, non-governmental organizations, in conjunction with the Committee, had organized symposia and seminars around the world which had served as powerful catalysts, had enabled thousands of leaders of such organizations to benefit from the insights and analyses of recognized experts and had provided a focal point for coordinating the strategies and actions of non-governmental organizations.

65. The Committee's important work, which enabled that innovative partnership to continue, illustrated the international community's ongoing commitment to the question of Palestine. There was a strong desire, at least in some circles, to dismiss the Committee and its special focus as outdated relics of a bygone era or to assign its functions to other units, under the smokescreen of "administrative reform". However, the political history of the past year illustrated the continuing fragility of the Middle East peace process and served as a reminder that, for the foreseeable future, the Committee should continue to provide a special focus and to represent an ongoing international consensus that the question of Palestine should remain on the United Nations agenda.

66. Hundreds of non-governmental organizations from around the world, ranging from small grass-roots organizations to large national ones and encompassing the full range of human endeavour, had affirmed their support for the Palestinian people through their affiliation with the Committee. It was their common commitment to the Palestinian people that enabled those organizations to work together, inspired by that people's struggle to assert its basic rights and to retain its dignity in the face of daily oppression and repressive measures designed to break its spirit. In that connection, he also acknowledged the contributions of the Israeli non-governmental organizations that were committed to finding a solution.

67. Although startling progress had been made over the past few years, the task of the partnership among non-governmental organizations, the Committee and the Palestinians themselves was far from complete. As the Committee commemorated 30 years of occupation, it was also acknowledging 30 years of struggle and 30 years of continuing dignity on the part of the Palestinian people.

68. The CHAIRMAN read out the following draft of a statement to be issued by the Committee on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the occupation by Israel of the Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, and other Arab territories:

> "Today, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People calls the attention of the States Members of the United Nations and of the entire international community to the fact that three decades after the hostilities of 1967 and the adoption by the Security Council of resolution 242 (1967), Israel continues its illegal occupation of large areas of Palestinian land in the West Bank, including Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip, as well as other Arab territories. By doing so, the occupying Power clearly defies the established norms of international law

and violates the provisions of scores of relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions and decisions.

"On this day, it is of paramount importance to remind ourselves that as a direct result of the Israeli occupation, the Palestinian people is living the life of a hostage in its own home, on its own land. The Palestinian people has not been able to enjoy its inalienable rights under the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. For too long, the Palestinian people has been denied human rights because its fate has been and to a large extent remains in the hands of the occupier. It has been denied economic rights because the occupier has strangulated what could have become a national, independent economy. It has been denied housing rights because the occupier has been confiscating its land and building illegal settlements. It has been denied religious rights and freedoms because of the occupation laws. Palestinian refugees have been denied the right of return because of restrictive Israeli legislation. The list of violations of the rights of the Palestinian people can be continued and Israel, the occupying Power, has carried out these actions and policies for all these years with remarkable impunity.

"The Palestinian people is due much credit. Throughout the entire occupation period and until this very day, the Palestinians have shown incredible, almost stoic, resilience, courage and persistence in overcoming the many challenges of their daily lives. In 1991, its leadership brought the Palestinian people to Madrid. In the course of the peace process, the Palestinian people has demonstrated its strong desire to take full control of its life and of its future and to pursue the right to self-determination and statehood.

"Our Committee believes that the role of the United Nations and of the international community as a whole is to assist the Palestinian people in accomplishing this task. No less today than 30 years ago, we are dedicated to working towards the exercise by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights. The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People reiterates that the United Nations has a permanent responsibility towards the question of Palestine until it is resolved in all its aspects. The United Nations has a crucial role to play in promoting the current peace process inasmuch as it is rooted in Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and the land-for-peace principle. Today, we must recommit ourselves with resolve to pursuing the goal of ending the decades-long illegal occupation of the Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, and other Arab territories and set out on a mission to bring about a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine and, with it, peace, stability and prosperity for the entire region of the Middle East.

"Today, in conclusion, we also reaffirm our support for the peace process and for the agreements reached thus far, and commit ourselves to making every effort to salvage the peace process, in the interest of all the peoples of the region and of international peace and security.".

69. The draft statement was adopted.

The meeting rose at 12.20 p.m.